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ABSTRACT

The U. S. Commission on Civil Disorders concluded that American society and its schools are racist. This position paper reasons, therefore, that white students and professional personnel are likely to be racist. Individual racism and institutional racism victimize black and white people and retard their adjustment and progress. Systems are interrelated and interdependent, they affect each other. Individuals affect systems and systems affect individuals. In determining possibilities for change, we have looked at fragments of black and white behavior as they might exist in the university system. As a general implication, counselors and other professional personnel must make commitments in the form of action in changing themselves and in changing the university. Some specific commitments follow in the form of recommendations for immediate action. (Author)

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"THE STUDENT PERSONNEL WORKER'S COMMITMENT TO ELIMINATING RACISM"

A Position Paper
by
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The U. S. Commission on Civil Disorders concluded that American society is racist. Brembeck in Social Foundations of Education stated that the school is a mirror of society. Thus, if society is racist and if the school is a mirror of society, then the school is racist. To go further, B. F. Skinner posited that behavior was shaped by various reinforcement events in the environment. Kurt Lewin believed that behavior was influenced by the field that the person operated in. Erich Fromm used the term social character to mean common characteristics of people living in an environment with similar common characteristics. Combs and Snygg viewed behavior as a function of how a person perceived things in his perceptual field. Thus, from the above, if behavior is determined by a person's environment, and if the societal environment and the school environment are racist, then there is a high probability that the "typical" white American will be racist.

Obversely, let me hasten to say that some white persons are not racist. The nonracist white person has been able to existentially transcend the deterministic self. He has chosen to change his environmental field and by doing so he has gained new insight and a new perspective. Another possibility is that other persons or another perso have changed his environment for him, for example, a significant black person.

In order for a white person to escape the determinism of American racism he must have strong will power, he must choose to gain new experiences in the area of race relations, and he must persevere the pain of conflict and incongruence involving old perceptions and new perceptions. For example, many whites in desegregated situations are

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now undergoing the pain of growth. Maslow revealed that many people are secure and safe being the way they are and they fear to take a step into the unknown. Maslow went further to state that, "Only the flexibly creative person can really manage future, only the one who can face novelty with confidence and without fear." He added, "and so there must be choice, conflict, and the possibility of regret."

American systems and American behavior are interdependent, the status of one depends on the status of the other. The university and the behavior of an individual in it are interdependent. To be brief both affect each other for the good or the bad. In our case, individual racism affects individual racism, institutional racism affects institutional racism.

Carmichael and Hamilton (1967) define racism as "the predication of decisions and policies on considerations of race for the purpose of subordinating a racial group and maintaining control over that group." One might ask, "What policies and decisions have been changed in the university in an attempt to eliminate racial subordination since the Supreme Court Decision of 1954?"

Carmichael and Hamilton (1967) go further to state that:

> Racism is both overt and covert. It takes two closely related forms: individual whites acting against individual blacks, and acts by the total white community against the black community. We call these individual racism and institutional racism.

The bombing of a black church, the lynching of a black man, and the intentional murder of rioters by policemen are examples of overt, individual racism. Gerrymandering in local government to keep black people from being elected is an example of subtle, institutional racism. The predominantly white American university is an example of subtle, institutional racism. It is an ethnocentric community irrelevant to the needs of black students and white students.

Malcolm X (1964) saw the handwriting on the wall when he predicted that students would revolt against institutional racism. He revealed in his autobiography just before his assasination that:

> As racism leads America up the suicide path, I do believe, from the experiences that I have had with them, that the whites of the younger generation, in the colleges and universities, will see the handwriting on the wall and many of them will turn to the spiritual path of truth--the only way left to American to ward off the disaster that racism must inevitably bring.

In further analyzing the rationale for student revolt, Eldridge Cleaver (1968) revealed that:

> In countless ways, the rebellion of the black students served as catalyst for the brewing revolt of the whites. What has suddenly happened is that the white race has lost its heroes. Worse, its heroes have been revealed as villains.

Along the same line, James Baldwin (1962), stated that, "White people cannot, in the generality, be taken as models of how to live. Rather, the white man is himself in sore need of new standards."

Much of what Cleaver and Baldwin diagnosed can be depicted in the labelling of whites in authority by white student rebels as being racist pigs, red necks, and bigots.

What has happened, the white Anglo-Saxon protestant model has been rejected by a significant number of black and white students. And this number is growing. Blacks have chosen models as Malcolm X and Eldridge Cleaver, rejecting models who represent the middle-class black Sambo of the old regime. By the same token, a number of white students have chosen models as Che Guevara and others, rejecting many American leaders whom they can no longer identify with, models who represent hypocrisy.

Students in the university who reject racism and hypocrisy simply want change. They are dissatisfied with the status quo. A student from Brooklyn College stated that:

> Students have put themselves in what we consider to be a moral role. We consider ourselves agents for changes that have been neglected, particularly in the area of racism. . .

It might be helpful here to pause and note how racism can affect black students. Racism has caused a number of black students to withdraw into a depressive shell and others to strike out against resisting administrators or any accessible white target. Racism has caused emotional disturbance, neurosis, and even psychosis among black students and other black people. The following is an attempt to make known some perceptions and feelings of black students. Black students in a white educational system.

Margaret Anderson (a white counselor) in Children of the South (1958) clearly articulated her perceptions of a black student's world when she wrote:

> The Negro child is different from other children, even other children of deprived backgrounds, because he has problems that are the product of a social order not of his making, or his forbears, . . . At every turn is an obstacle, and forever, and ever, the Negro child must ask himself, "Why?"
>
> Getting into a black student's frame of reference, for him:
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> 1. Being black means to walk across campus on my first day of class and not see one black student.
>
> 2. Being black means to have all white teachers and to be surrounded in class by all white or nearly all white students.
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> 3. Being black is to open my textbooks and see pictures of white folk and to read white washed theory, philosophy and history which are irrelevant to me.

4. Being black means to go to a white counselor whom I don't trust, and who doesn't know how to handle my presence nor my problem.

5. Being black is trying to get administrators to understand my needs and to do something about them, or trying to convince a campus policeman that he should not arrest me out of prejudice.

6. Being black is tolerating Nigra for Negro and favoring neither.

7. Being black is to watch whites look upon my natural hair, my mustache, my African garments, my black music and literature, my black community language and my other symbols of black pride as being deviant.

8. Being black is seeing a soul sister or brother slaving overtime on a dirty, menial job and being underpaid.

9. Being black is to go into a class disadvantaged and find that I have a teacher who believes it is impossible for a black student to make an "A" or "B" grade.

10. Being black is not having a penny in my pocket and seeing white students visit Europe and Mexico and driving fancy sports cars, and at the same time knowing that their parents and ancestors got rich off the sweat and pain of my parents and ancestors.

11. Being black is to be a resource person for curious white folk who, after being answered, are not willing to accept my expertise.

12. Being black is to know that my great, great grandmother was raped and labelled promiscuous, that my great, great grandfather was worked from dawn to dusk and labelled lazy, that my father was denied a job and labelled shiftless, that my sister was "busted" upside the head by some racist with an axe handle, while policemen laughed, and then labelled her as a trouble-maker. And finally, that I was denied an equal opportunity and labelled as "culturally deprived."

13. Being black means to be in an ocean of white stimuli, to be angry consciously or unconsciously, to continuously struggle with oneself to deny hostile feeling, angry feeling. (I might add that there is no difference between the anger of a black rioter and that of a black Ph.D. but rather a difference in the way these feelings come out.)

14. Finally being black means to be lonely, hyperalienated, depressed, displayed, ignored and harassed. Just the fact of being black is to be at the brink of revolt.

Let me hasten to say that there is a bright side to being black in a white university. I might pause to mention it here.

Being black in a predominantly white university gives the black student an opportunity to learn from a number of students of different backgrounds and thus

to combine these experiences with his own. The black student gets an opportunity to be exposed to facilities and national personalities that some black colleges cannot afford. He gets an opportunity to become more verbal in a verbal community. He gains more of an appreciation for blackness when he goes back into the black community. This experience gives him a feeling of consciousness and awareness that he is black. The black student gains an appreciation of other black students because of the fact that few are on campus. This appreciation creates a bond of unity and cooperation among black students. Black students gain opportunities to establish meaningful relationships with white people, many for the first time. (We should also keep in mind that there are benefits for whites in experiencing blacks who are within the university community.)

The behavior of black students and faculty is in large part a reaction to the behavior of white persons who are in the university and vice versa. Hence, it might be wise here to look at the other side of the coin, that is, to attempt to assume a white frame of reference. In doing so, for many white persons in the predominantly white university:

1. Being white means to have low expectations for blacks and to be surprised when blacks surpass my expectations.

2. Being white means to want to be punished for my guilty racial feeling, and also to know that some angry blacks want to punish whites. Therefore, I can free myself of racist guilt by entering a masochistic-sadistic relationship with blacks.

3. Being white means to hate "niggers" who cause conflict and trouble, to try to ignore and avoid them but to be forced to respect them.

4. Being white is to love those Negroes who think and act like me, who are nonthreatening to me, but whom I don't respect.

5. Being white is to use intellectualism as a defense mechanism in hiding my racial feelings.

6. Being white means to use research and committees confounded with dishonesty in order to camouflage progress.

7. Being white is to know what is best for "you colored people" and to be frustrated when you resist me and not listen to me.

8. Being white means to be afraid to openly dislike or disagree with blacks for fear that I might be rejected as a racist.

9. Being white is to be courteous to blacks because my parents taught me to be mannerly in public. If I don't, I will feel guilty and my conscience will punish me.

10. Being white means to refuse to take action or to make an open commitment, but rather to tell blacks behind closed doors, "I am on your side."

11. Being white means to be rejected by whites for taking action to help blacks or to be rejected by blacks for taking the wrong action.

12. Being white is to be afraid to go into a black community without a black person.

13. Being white is to be confused among the terms "black," "Negro," and "colored."

14. Being white means to try to help blacks when some are not helping themselves.

15. Being white means to feel apologetic, sympathetic, incongruent, resisting, revengeful, dishonest, tolerating, disgusted, angry, guilty, afraid, and superior.

16. Being white in a number of cases means to feel that I am doing the best I can do.

Summary

American society and its schools are racist. Therefore, white students and professional personnel are likely to be racist. Individual racism and institutional racism victimize black and white people and retard their adjustment and progress. Systems are interrelated and interdependent, they affect each other. Individuals affect systems and systems affect individuals. In determining possibilities for change, we have looked at fragments of black behavior and white behavior as they might exist in the university system. As a general implication, counselors and other professional personnel must make commitments in the form of action in changing themselves and in changing the university. Some specific commitments follow in the form of recommendations for immediate action.

Recommendations for Action

1. Counselors and other student personnel workers must take a strong stand and firm action against any evidence of racism in the university. Racism that can be a threat to our whole clientele.

2. The orientation of graduate programs for counselor education must be changed to include nonwhite oriented research and nonwhite oriented literature, along with approaches for dealing with <u>all</u> clients. Counselors in training must have experiences to expand racial awareness, to remove racial hangups and to develop flexible creativity.

3. Graduate departments of guidance and counselor education must recruit nonwhite graduate students to be trained to fill the need for nonwhite counselors and Counselor Education in the universities.

4. The teacher, the student personnel worker and the administrator must make unbiased decisions free from racial partiality.

5. There should be a person employed to facilit ate communication between the administration and faculty and the students in identifying and meeting the changing needs of students.

6. Interracial groups should be employed in expanding racial awareness among students and other university persons.

7. Student personnel workers should support those demands of student revolters which are relevant to the growth of the university.

8. The counselor must counsel the black student in making the transition to identity, to a positive self concept.

9. The counselor must get away from comparing all students to a white middle-class model.

10. As an advisor, the counselor should recommend courses that are meaningful to black students.

11. As a vocational counselor, the counselor should acknowledge areas to the black student that might be relevant to him in improving the black community.

12. The counselor must close the social distance between black students and white students. Black students must feel free to be a part of all student activities and reciprocally white students must feel welcomed to participate in all black oriented activities.

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